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ABSTRACT

A study investigated the personal and career choices that motivate an educator's departure from active involvement in forensics activities, and what trends, if any, exist concerning what former directors do in place of forensics. The study also investigated how forensics participation as a coach/director impacted on the individual, and what suggestions these individuals might have for change in the forensic activity itself. A cross sectional sample of former coaches and directors which included debate and individual events specialists and community college and four-year institutions, and took into account geographic distribution and range of time spent in forensics direction, was surveyed by telephone. Results showed that: (1) the greatest number of factors for leaving the activity were associated with the personal demands (especially time and travel) placed on directors; (2) activities taken on since leaving forensics included administration, consulting and volunteer projects, and course development; (3) the most transferable skills were thought to be organizational abilities, student interaction skills, and money management; (4) the most positive aspect of the career change was having the time to do other things; (5) the most missed aspect of forensics was direct interaction with students; and (6) there was a general consensus that the winning standards of forensic competitions were not reality standards, and that performance evaluation standards should be reassessed. (One table of data is included.) (PRA)

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THE NON-FORENSICS AFTER-LIFE OF A FORENSICS DIRECTOR

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Involvement in forensics as a faculty member can seem to be all consuming. For many forensics educators the commitment to the activity may appear to be something that will/would have covered an entire academic career. This last observation is typically not representative of reality. A simple review of the list of peers forensics directors have known, will support the idea that most forensics professionals retire from active forensics coaching/directing prior to leaving the field of education. It might be argued that such change represents a natural evolution of educational involvement. It might also be argued that departures from the coaching and directing ranks suggests concerns about the nature and demands of forensics itself. Regardless of the motivation to leave active forensics coaching and/or directing, it should be of interest to current forensics educators to establish what happens when full time participation in forensics ends.

Some might be quick to suggest that "Life begins after the coaching/directing demands end!" However, the reality of an educational career that does not include active forensics involvement can be frightening to those who have committed a significant portion of their professional life to the activity. No forensics professional is surprised at the observation that the activity places an enormous time and energy demand on the coach/director. Even moderately active regional programs with average student numbers can

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absorb the majority of time committed to the career of an educator who coaches forensics. While a job description will suggest that theoretically forensics involvement is not the primary role of the educator (at least based on most release time packages), reality supports that being a coach/judge does become a person's primary job responsibility. Leaving the ranks of active coaching/directing does represent a major career change for the education professional. This project sought to identify the nature and impact of such a change.

Two primary goals and two secondary goals were established. The first primary goal was to develop an understanding and appreciation for the personal and career choices that motivated a departure from active involvement in daily forensics activities. A second goal was to generate data concerning what trends, if any, exist concerning what former directors do to take the place of forensics. Two secondary goals were to investigate how forensics participation as a coach/director impacted on the individual, and finally to use the subject pool as a source of suggestions for change in the forensic activity itself.

Methodology

Previous projects on this and related topics have used various methods to survey active forensics coaches about their attitudes concerning the activity (Gill 1990). This project focussed on those who have already made the decision to leave active coaching ranks. By contacting leaders of national and regional forensics organizations a list of "retired" directors was compiled. Additional subjects were added to the sample through interviews with the former directors. Based on the original list a cross sectional sample was established which included debate and individual events specialists, community college and four year institutions, geographic

distribution, and a range of time spent in forensics direction.

The data was generated through telephone interviews with sample group using a set of core questions. Additional questions were posed based on the direction of the interview.

The goal of this project was not to generate statistical patterns but rather to determine if there is some sort of qualitative pattern to the factors associated with a decision to leave the active coaching/directing rank. The questions asked were designed to allow open ended response from the interviewees. The questions asked included the following:

1. **What factors influenced your decision to end your forensics directing?**
2. **What activities have you taken on since you gave up forensics?**
3. **What are the most transferable skills you gained from your forensics work?**
4. **What are the most positive aspects of your career change?**
5. **What do you miss most about being away from forensics?**
6. **After being away from forensics what changes would you make in the activity?**
7. **Do you have any parting comments you'd like to make?**

Responses to these questions were recorded as well as the opinions and observations which surfaced during each individual interview. Each person was encouraged to reflect on the impact of forensics on his/her life.

Results

Respondents averaged seventeen years of experience in forensics education and spent an average of 13.3 years as director of a forensic program. On average, the respondent had been away from active forensics coaching/directing

for just over four years.

TABLE ONE

	High	Low	Average	Most Common Response
Time in forensics*	27	7	17	14-16
Time as director*	25	2	13.3	11-14
Time away from activity*	15	1	4.1	2-3

*in years

As noted earlier the sample reflected a cross section of interest and specializations. In general these respondents represented a group of extremely experienced forensics professionals. What follows is a question by question synthesis of responses which highlights what should be the more thought providing comments.

Q1. What factors influenced your decision to end your forensic directing career?

Many if not most of the responses fell into three general categories: demands became too great, administrative requirements were burdensome, new opportunities were appealing. By far the greatest number of factors for leaving the activity were associated with the personal demands placed on directors. Time commitments associated with forensics eventually became too great. The rigors of frequent travel finally took their toll on the respondents. These types of demands were often accompanied by statements of frustration about program administration. Budget battles, demands to rejustify the activity year in and year out were common responses. As one respondent put it "I became fed up with the notion I had to literally beg for money so I could add hundreds of hours and miles of travel to my schedule."

On a more positive note several individuals indicated they left forensics

in order to take on new challenges, primarily in academic administration. Respondents were currently or recently had been, department chairs, faculty senate presidents and associate deans.

Additional notable reasons for leaving included giving others a chance to be director, a desire to return to full time classroom work and disappointment with compensation for being director.

Q2. What activities have you taken on since you gave forensics?

Based on the responses to the first question it is no surprise that several respondents moved into some form of administration. Department chair responsibilities were the most common positions followed by shared governance positions.

What may be surprising was the extent of off campus activities taken on by the sample. Consulting projects were mentioned as well as various volunteer projects. Some of these undertakings were quite unique including running a dinner theatre and writing a movie review for community newspapers.

Several respondents spoke of their intensified attention to course development and/or research projects.

Q3. What are the most transferable skills you gained from forensics work?

Most respondents had little trouble quickly generating a multiple item list for this question. While the responses were widely varied three basic themes were common. By far the most frequently noted skill dealt with organizational abilities. Anyone associated with forensics is well aware of the idea that acute organizational competency is a basic survival skill for the activity. It would seem logical that the myriad of personal resources used to administer a forensics program would readily transfer to other

activities. Some interesting specialized organizational skills were highlighted by respondents. Being able to "move in several different administrative circles at the same time" was mentioned. Another respondent (who was currently a department chair!) noted that "mistrust" was one of the notable transferable skills! Argumentation ability was highlighted by some respondents as well. A second category of responses focused on student interaction skills. Such things as one-to-one rapport building, appreciation of student perspectives, and sensitivity to student needs were mentioned frequently. One respondent commented on the ability to "motivate the already motivated" in reference to working with a highly skilled student population typical of most forensics squads. Many respondents indicated they felt they were better classroom teachers because of the forensics experience.

The third most frequently mentioned skill transfer dealt with money management. Juggling budgets, forecasting travel expenses, fund raising, all demanded abilities which were seen as useful outside forensics.

Q4. What are the most positive aspects of your career change?

No question drew a quicker or more consistent response than this one. TIME!!! TIME!!! was literally the universal response. The fact that "more time to do other things" was a common response was not surprising. The quickness of response and level of enthusiasm with which the response was delivered was surprising (and somewhat amusing). What this free time meant to each respondent may have varied but the basic theme was the same. One interviewee noted a 60% reduction in work with no change in compensation. Others spoke of the "freedom of choice" on time demands. More time for family and self were common themes. Time for course work attention and/or "other projects" were noted. Many respondents were quite succinct on this notion;

"Saturdays" and "weekends" were spoken of fondly. The ability to choose what to do on any given weekend was highlighted.

Related benefits included a more relaxed professional and personal attitude and elimination of "October Stress." More than one respondent mentioned they "did not miss" the repetitious practice sessions.

Q5. What do you miss most about forensics?

Reactions to this question reflected the traditional/accepted strengths of the activity. "Direct interaction with the students" was the overwhelming comment. Respondents noted that the opportunity for on-to-one work with students is almost nonexistent in other academic endeavors. These interactions were described as intellectually stimulating and personally satisfying. In this same area respondents reflected on the high quality of students in forensics and noted the absence of this when working with the larger whole campus student population.

Receiving nearly equal attention was the notion of collegial interaction. The idea that a person's "best friends" and closest colleagues are/were coaches from competing schools was frequently mentioned.

It was noted that this aspect of forensics was most difficult to replace. In all but one instance the school's program remained active which allowed for interaction with the student competitors if desired. However coaches from other institutions were not as easily accessible which created a void.

Other responses included missing the intellectual challenge in general and missing judging in particular.

Q6. After your time away from forensics what changes would you make to the activity?

Q7. What parting comments would you care to make?

The final two questions were designed to offer the interviewees a chance to reflect on forensics as an "insider" who has stepped away from the activity. These questions caused the longest hesitations from the respondents. They also generated the widest spectrum of comments.

Very few of the comments were duplicated by more than one respondent. Those that were seemed to fall into what might be called the traditional criticisms of the activity. The emphasis on competition was noted by a few of those interviewed. These comments were often linked to observations concerning the significance placed on national tournaments. Some of the former directors saw the competition emphasis and national qualification focus as negatively affecting the educational benefit of the activity. The last of the repeated comments dealt with the often mentioned dilemma of "real world is forensics world" standards for performance. The artificial nature of some individual events and the delivery standards for debate were typical areas of concern. In reflecting on the activity there was a call for reassessing some of the standards forensics sets for performance evaluation. As one person said, "Winning standards are not reality standards."

There were several comments that could be catalogued as university policy concerns. Most respondents offered at least one comment relating to the need for a change in attitude and/or policy toward forensics by the non-forensics community. General comments included the need for more support from school administration, and the hope for increase in respect for forensics educators/scholars from the rest of the academic community. Specific suggestions ranged from securing of assistants to reduce travel demands on single coach programs, to load reductions of 50 - 60% for all coaches.

Discussion and Conclusions

One transferable skill that was not mentioned but one that should be

obvious to all who are familiar with forensics is that forensics professionals have an opinion about everything! And more importantly these opinions are usually supported by some fairly well thought investigation. (The editorial bias is duly noted in these last two observations).

The individuals interviewed had typically devoted a major portion of their professional careers to forensics. This fact, combined with the intense and often all inclusive nature of the activity made the transition from active coaching and/or directing to a non-forensics based vocation, a major life style change. The decision to pursue other interests was not made quickly by the respondents. Nor was the decision made without reservation and fear in some cases. As one person said "I was afraid I might want to go back." In fact several of these "retired" forensics coaches continued to be very involved in the activity. This suggests the positive nature of time spent as a forensics educator.

Based on the interviews it can be argued that upon leaving active forensics directing it is quite common to move up the organization chart. University administration and/or national leadership positions seem to be common replacements for former directors.

This may suggest a couple of conclusions. It is often said that forensics educators do not seem to have the support and respect of the overall university. Yet forensics professionals are often elected or appointed to positions of leadership within the system. Perhaps there <u>is</u> more respect than first thought. Secondly, it appears obvious that to prosper or even survive as a director of forensics it is critical to develop skills which will be invaluable in any professional setting. After coordinating travel for groups of ten to thirty people and directing a forensics tournament for hundreds of competitors many other professional tasks faced seem fairly routine.

The interviews also revealed that a personal life is severely tested by a

commitment to forensics. So many of the respondents spoke in detail about the joy of having time for their family and for themselves. This suggests a real concern which is constantly addressed by the forensics community but still remains a situation which has changed very little over the years. Forensics professionals allow the activity to become almost all consuming. At times it seems that the standard approach is to exploit the forensic professional as intensely as possible and then replace him/her with fresh blood after burn-out occurs. Concerning the decision to leave forensics; respondents in this study spoke of "being tired" much more often than they spoke of "being eager to try something new." This becomes more telling given the longevity of the respondents. Even those who love the activity feel the intense pressure/ commitment becomes overwhelming.

The final set of conclusions center on the relationship that seems to exist between forensics and its coaches/directors. Forensics is a very demanding master/mistress that seems to always want a little more from its participants. But in this same vein forensics is an extremely generous gift giver which returns the favors it receives.

It became quite clear that retired forensics professionals do not slow down. They take on new challenges, both personal and professional; they share their talents and skills with a wide variety of groups.

Abundantly clear is the fact that being a forensic educator will foster an appreciation of free time; even if it takes "retirement" to realize this.

One last observation may prove revealing. During several of the interviewing people noted that on any given Saturday they would stop what they were doing and think about what campus they used to be at for so many years.

Apparently the heart of a forensics director still travels even if his/her suitcase never leaves the closet!